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ABSTRACT

A probability sample survey of 1,541 residents of Ontario, Canada investigated: (1) the scope of involvement of adults in deliberate part-time learning activities, and (2) the possible role that educational communications media could play in extending educational opportunities to adults. Involvement in education varied according to age, educational attainment, income, occupation, place of residence, and native language, but overall results showed that 30 percent of adults were engaged in deliberate educational activities, and an additional 18 percent were interested in learning activities but were not presently involved. Obstacles that presented participation in education were investigated with the hope that in the future educational media could increase access. The report briefly discussed the institutions, subject areas, methods, and motivations that are employed in adult education. (EMH)

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SUMMARY

of the main findings of the study

"DEMAND FOR PART-TIME LEARNING IN ONTARIO"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

What is the nature and scope of deliberate involvement of adults in formal and non-formal part-time learning activities in a region containing an abundance of institutions of formal education? What is the specific contribution which educational broadcasting and, in general, educational communications media can make in an area which is probably one of the most media-saturated areas in the world? To answer the first question, a major probability sample survey was carried out by the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (OECA). The OECA operates a network of educational television stations in Ontario, Canada, and provides program services through cable systems and distribution of videotapes.

Results indicate that 30 percent of the approximately 5 million adults living in the province were engaged in a deliberate learning activity. A further 18 percent wish to undertake part-time deliberate learning.

The survey was conducted between 28 October 1974 and 10 January 1975, through personal interviews with 1,541 male and female residents of Ontario of age 18 to 69 not enrolled in educational institutions as full-time students. The respondents were selected in a multi-staged systematic random sample.

The findings, as well as the findings related to obstacles to learning experienced by different groups of the adult population are being used in drawing of conclusions regarding the role of the media and, in particular, the mass media, in meeting those needs for part-time learning which are not being met by the existing opportunities and facilities, on the one hand, and on the other -- in removing the obstacles which hamper access to learning for those who consciously desire to enter such an educational venture.

The study points, for example, to many specific areas where media support may be of help. In some cases, it identifies unserved target audiences, in other cases it implies the use of more diversified teaching/learning situations. In still others it points to the need for a new curriculum so as to make it more pertinent to learning needs which Learners and future Learners can identify as their own.

The following are selected highlights of the study.

THE "LEARNERS" AND THE "WOULD-BE-LEARNERS"

The number of Ontario adults who are actively engaged in learning can be considered by all standards as relatively high. The incidence of learning, as well as the interest in learning by those who are not yet engaged in a deliberate learning process, spreads over the entire spectrum of adulthood and early old-age. At least 1,400,000 adults are actively engaged in a systematic learning activity; 80 percent of them have the intention of continuing systematic learning in the near future, and over 800,000 adults who currently are not engaged in such an activity - at least in their own perception - express the intention to study in the next year or two.

One of the main conclusions that may be derived from these data is that Ontario's educational opportunities are numerous and relatively accessible to many parts of the population. The educational services in Ontario are already, to a significant degree, "open". Judging, however, from the number of Would-Be-Learners and their specific demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and - as it will be seen later - from the reasons why the Non-Learners do not participate in learning activities, the educational services in their present state are not sufficiently adapted to the needs of numerous <u>specific</u> population groups.

Among those who require a more "open" educational system are women, particularly women of age 18 to 20, 25 to 34 and 45 to 49, and persons of certain types of occupations, e.g., homemakers and clerical workers.

The results of this study indicate clearly that working adults need new and a greater variety of educational services and opportunities. Anticipating findings which will be discussed later, it should be pointed out that these newly required services would have to take into account, to a greater degree than existing services, people's constraints in time, in geographic location, in ability to leave home, in ability to travel, etc. Opportunities better adapted to particular needs are also required by both the youngest adults and the middle aged.

In large urban centres, despite the high incidence of learning, more learning opportunities are needed for numerous groups of adults unable to take advantage of existing ones.

More efforts are needed to make learning accessible to various ethnic groups, particularly the French speaking population of Ontario.

Income level and the level of educational attainment are closely related to participation in adult learning. The more people are educated and the more money they earn, the more actively they are interested in learning. However, the variable that is most responsible

for the incidence of learning seems to be educational attainment. If the incidence of learning is higher among those with a higher personal and family income, it appears to be so because their educational attainment is generally higher.

The gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" in education seems to widen, though the level of educational achievement of the population in general seems to be increasing. More efforts are needed if there is to be any change in the chronic situation in which the lower socioeconomic classes are consistently "under-represented" among adult learning participants, while those of the middle and upper groups are consistently "over-represented".

Among those who are in search for learning opportunities better adapted to their needs one may also identify four other significant groups: white-collar workers, unskilled labourers, rural adults and home-bound people.

Looking at the findings from the point of view of different variables, the relatively major groups of Learners can be identified as:

- persons of age 18 to 29
- men of age 18 to 34
- women of age 18 to 29 and of age 45 to 49
- singles
- persons whose language most often spoken at home is English

- those with at least some post-secondary education
- persons who are employed full-time
- professionals and white-collar workers
- people with a family income of over $20,000
- people in communities of over 500,000
- persons residing in South Central Ontario

The major clusters of Would-Be-Learners comprise:

- women of age 18 to 34 and age 45 to 49
- men of age 25 to 29
- persons with children at home
- persons with more than grade school education and less than completed high school
- people with at least some post-secondary education
- homemakers
- people employed part-time
- white-collar, clerical workers
- unskilled labourers
- people with a personal income below $7,500 and above $12,000
- people living in centres of 30,000 to 100,000 and in rural areas
- people living in Eastern Ontario

Among Non-Learners, the most significant groups can be identified as:

- people of age 50 to 69 and age 40 to 44

- men of age 40 and over
- women of age 50 and over
- persons with 5 or more children at home
- persons who are widowed, separated or divorced
- persons speaking languages other than English at home
- people whose educational attainment is not higher than grade school
- retired persons
- farmers
- unskilled labourers
- persons with a family income of less than $10,000
- people from rural areas and from centres of 10,000 to 30,000
- residents of Northeastern Ontario.

WHERE DO ADULTS LEARN?

While 70 percent of Learners take at least one course in a formal education institution, all formal education institutions together have only a 30 percent share of the total learning activities of adults. In other words, 70 percent of deliberate learning takes place outside the system whose primary objective is education.

Still, taking into account the number of different individuals served, the greatest suppliers of educational opportunities throughout the Province remain

undoubtedly formal education institutions. However, the share of specific types of formal education institutions varies quite substantially from area to area. For example, while in South Central Ontario, universities provide for over 17 percent of the adult learning activities, their role in northern parts of the province is considerably smaller in this respect. Anticipating other data that will be discussed later, it is conceivable that a certain type of tele-university, i.e., a higher education institution designed specifically to meet the needs of people living in areas where universities are not easily accessible, may well fill a significant gap.

While, as the study shows, there is a considerable number of Would-Be-Learners interested in formal learning among the population of the older age brackets, formal education institutions seem to cater more to the needs of younger persons.

Also, courses available at the place of work or organized by the employer seem to be oriented rather toward the younger age brackets, leaving the occupational concerns of the older people unmet.

Very few learning opportunities seem to be offered at the place of work for unskilled workers. The study indicates that among this occupational group there are more Would-Be-Learners than Learners. The gap in educational opportunities for this group becomes more evident if we take into account

the fact that their major interest is vocational education.

Nearly 40 percent of all adult Learners participate in learning for credit. However, here again, it seems that the opportunities for learning for credit are designed to fit the needs of the young. The study shows clearly that the demand for this type of learning is considerably higher among older age groups.

Self-directed learning is very popular among Ontario adults. Another form of home-based learning, learning through radio and television, also seems to be quite substantial in comparison with the relatively few opportunities for systematic study currently being offered. These factors, seen in the light of the demand for more formally recognized learning schemes, as well as in the light of a number of other elements that will be mentioned later, seem to indicate the need for the introduction of a greater variety of forms for sequential and structured learning.

WHAT DO ADULTS LEARN?

Occupational concerns of all kinds are undoubtedly one of the most powerful motivational forces for learning. Sixty percent of all Learners study at least one subject related to their jobs and occupations, and nearly half of all learning projects are connected with this domain of interest. The

intentions of Would-Be-Learners are similar, although, as a greater proportion of them are not employed, they may be less inclined to articulate this motivation.

A substantial amount of learning takes place as a result of concerns related to personal growth, development and self-realization. The other two major stimulants are recreational interests and the interest in attaining higher levels of formal education.

Very often the nominal description of the subjects people study or intend to study may not be easily identifiable with their actual interest and purpose of learning. It is also conceivable that people may often not be in a position to recognize easily whether or not a given subject area is, in fact, congruent with their desires and aspirations. It seems particularly important, therefore, that educators and educational planners provide opportunities for learning that are more closely related to peoples' desires and motivations, and that educational opportunities be described in terms of the various goals they can help to achieve.

The analysis of what people learn, as well as the comparison of information related to Learners and Would-Be-Learners seem to point to a number of gaps. For example, more flexible educational opportunities are needed in the domain of vocational and professional

education, particularly for persons of age 18 to 24, for women, and for persons with a relatively lower level of educational attainment.

More flexible learning opportunities in the domain of formal education seem to be needed to meet the needs of persons of age 21 to 24 and 45 to 55, and in particular of women, of persons with some post-secondary education, and of professionals, executives, and managers.

More opportunities for education in the domain of hobbies and recreation seem to be required for women of age 21 to 55, for persons with an educational attainment below completed high school, and for homemakers.

Opportunities for personal development are in high demand by persons of age 25 to 29, and by persons without any secondary education.

PREFERRED METHODS OF LEARNING

We have already indicated the considerable popularity of self-directed learning, as well as the significant participation in radio and television learning relative to the number of study opportunities offered by the media in a systematic way.

The information on the methods of learning which Learners and Would-Be-Learners prefer and/or consider

suitable adds additional light on the problem of home-centred learning or learning at-a-distance. On the surface it may be striking that the traditional methods of classes and lectures are still very popular among adults. The other side of the coin is, however, that hundreds of thousands of persons consider suitable and, in many cases, prefer to learn through such methods as learning by correspondence, short term seminars and conferences, community groups, interest groups, action groups, watching specially produced television programs accompanied by study guides, listening to educational radio programs and audio cassettes accompanied by study guides, and through self-directed learning. It seems that in a situation where hundreds of thousands of people cannot use the existing educational opportunities, there is plenty of room for initiative and plenty of promise for success for the introduction of a variety of multi-media and multi-method teaching/learning schemes and approaches designed for specific target audiences and specific subject areas.

DO ADULTS WANT CREDITS? DO ADULTS WANT DEGREES?

Over 1,300,000 Learners and Would-Be-Learners are interested in learning for credit or some other kind of recognition of their learning effort as compared with about 500,000 persons who currently study for credit. The two most numerous groups, counting each around a half a million people, seek a written confirmation of satisfactory completion of a course of study, or a credit toward a professional or vocational

certificate. Over 200,000 adults want to study for a credit toward a university degree and about 50,000 for a high school credit.

The interest in official recognition of the learning effort is not less noticeable among respondents with higher levels of educational attainment. This interest is higher among employed respondents than among non-employed and among those employed full-time than part-time.

The desire for credits is not limited to those who study academic or vocational subjects. A large proportion of persons interested in personal development, hobbies and recreation, home and family, and other educational purposes having very little to do with the realm of formal steps, levels, grades, etc., would, still, very much like to have some kind of an official recognition for their learning effort. One has the impression that for many people the issuing of certificates of completion of courses, of achievement, or simply of attendance, may play a motivational role in learning.

Learners and Would-Be-Learners were asked whether they would like to get a degree or diploma if they had the opportunity within the next ten years. Nearly 70 percent of Learners and 60 percent of Would-Be-Learners answered in the affirmative.

Among Learners, seen from the numerical point of view, the most popular title is a Bachelor's degree, followed

by a certificate or license to practice an occupation. The third place - in terms of frequency of expressed desire - is taken by a Master's degree.

Would-Be-Learners are most frequently interested in occupational credentials, followed by a high school diploma and Bachelor's degree.

The most popular credits through all age groups are a Bachelor's degree and an occupational license.

Speaking in numerical terms, it can be estimated that about 350,000 individuals would be interested in Bachelor's degrees, which is about the same number of people who are interested in occupational certificates or licenses; over 200,000 persons are interested in Masters degrees; about 160,000 in high school diplomas; about the same number in community college diplomas; and about 60,000 in Doctors degrees.

WHY ADULTS LEARN

The establishing of reasons for which people learn, on the basis of their spontaneous replies during a survey interview, is important for the design of learning programs to meet people's needs, for the proper marketing and promotion of available learning opportunities, etc. The importance of providing learning opportunities designed in content and form to relate better to the needs and desires felt by people themselves cannot be overemphasized.

By far the two largest clusters of reasons are the desire to achieve personal goals, understood as a quest for personal growth, development and fulfillment, and the desire to achieve practical goals, understood as some kind of material benefits. These two categories of reasons are most frequently mentioned by both Learners and Would-Be-Learners, by respondents of all age groups, and of both sexes, of all levels of educational attainment and of all other demographic and socioeconomic variables. Relatively few answers reflect a desire to meet a religious or social goal. Also relatively low is the frequency of referring to the desires to meet family needs. Generally speaking, there is a high degree of congruency between the responses related to categories of learning interests, and the responses regarding reasons for learning.

OBSTACLES TO LEARNING

Perhaps the best way of summing up the findings about barriers to learning and reasons for not learning would be to look at the data from the perspective of the total population. Nearly two million adults in the province consider that being busy is an obstacle to learning. Nearly 700,000 persons, 15 percent of the total adult population, consider that they can't afford learning activities, and half-a-million people consider that they are too tired to learn. Over half-a million find it too hard to get out of the house, and for nearly half-a-million people courses are located too far away.

Nearly 400,000 people dislike schedules and exams, over 300,000 adults are not certain that the courses that are available are of value to them, and a quarter-of-a-million consider that the available courses do not correspond to their interests.

Lack of self-confidence does not seem to be a major obstacle only about 4 percent of all respondents are not sure that they are capable to handle learning, and about 6 percent feel that they lack the prior education necessary for further learning.

Let's set aside such reasons as being too busy, being too tired and lack of interest in further learning assuming - rightly or wrongly - that they belong to those about which the educational planner or administrator can do little. The major group of obstacles to which solutions have to be sought will then be those related to financial problems, mobility, and problems with adapting to existing opportunities. It might be worthwhile to have a look at how they affect the major clusters of Would-Be-Learners and Non-Learners.

Women of age 18 to 34 and 45 to 49 have been identified as a major group seeking an opportunity for learning. When we look at the obstacles which respondents mentioned most often, financial and mobility problems are on the top of the list for women-Would-Be-Learners of age 18 to 24; for women of age 25 to 44, they are in second, third, and fourth place,

immediately after "being busy". For another major cluster of Would-Be-Learners - men of age 25 to 29 - financial problems are the second most frequently mentioned, and those related to mobility problems are fourth on the list of obstacles.

Seen from the perspective of other variables, Would-Be-Learners with children at home list the financial and mobility problems in second, third, and fourth place. The same three obstacles related to financial problems and mobility are on the top three or four places on the list for Would-Be-Learners who are homemakers, for Would-Be-Learners with only some and completed post-secondary education, for white-collar workers and unskilled labourers, and for Would-Be-Learners living in Eastern Ontario.

The patterns are very similar for Non-Learners except that the problem of adaptability to existing opportunities, and problems related to the lack of self-confidence seem to be of somewhat greater importance.

The analysis of obstacles to learning and reasons for not learning seem to point once again to the great role that media-based educational systems could play in meeting the learning needs of the Ontario population, particularly if they were combined with a variety of interactive teaching/learning situations adapted to people's requirements in terms of time, location and approach. A more detailed discussion of these problems is, however, outside the terms of reference of this report.